

Controlling cell counts in organic herds presents different challenges but Worcestershire farmer Oliver Surman has managed to reduce bulk cell counts from over 300,000 cells/ml to around 135,000 cells/ml through a targeted approach.

Oliver runs a herd of 200 organically managed cows with his father Peter at Upton on Severn. The young herd averages in excess of 6000 litres. Cell counts had been a problem with the bulk tank figure averaging over 300,000 despite milk from the worst cell count cows being kept out of the tank. The NMR herd cell count was regularly over 400,000.

Working with Promar International consultant Danni Cooke who visits the farm regularly under the Dairy Excellence Programme, a plan was devised to get cell counts under control and avoid discarding so much milk.

Before deciding on specific action, bacteriology tests were carried out to try and identify the principal causes of infections. The tests showed that environmental pathogens, mostly *Strep uberis* and *E coli* were the main problems and this information helped determine the plan.

The first step was to treat the high cell count cows. Any cow identified by NMR as having a cell count in excess of one million is CMT tested to identify the problem quarter. This allows cows to be treated early and with the most appropriate drug to help prevent repeat cases and reduce treatment usage.

Priority is given to fresh calved cows and those still giving high yields. To help with monitoring these cows a new fresh cow group was set up. "Cows stay in the group until they have got over calving and are settled into lactation and are clear of infection," explains Oliver. "We temperature check cows regularly as a means of determining if they have an infection."

The main herd are housed in sawdust bedded cubicles and more attention has been paid to cubicle cleanliness to help reduce the impact of environmental pathogens. In addition the cubicles are currently being renovated.

To help with spotting mastitis earlier, extra training was given to the Polish milking staff and Oliver is certain that this has made a big difference. "By identifying any cases sooner we have been able to reduce the severity of infection and the incidence of repeat cases. Furthermore by treating high cell count cows we have brought the bulk tank reading down, the challenge now is to maintain the current low levels and reduce drug usage to a minimum," he explains. "credit must go to the guys in the parlour who have really worked hard to achieve the results we see today."

Danni Cooke and Oliver have also reviewed dry cow management. While all cows are treated with Orbeseal, only problem cows receive dry cow therapy as a means of reducing drug usage. "Any cows that had a high cell count will be treated as they dry off," comments Oliver.